



*1 and 2 Samuel: Growing a Heart for God*  
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# What Matters Most to God? The Heart!

## I SAMUEL 16:1–13

In recent years there has been a great deal written about birth order and how it impacts children and the way they grow up. This is nothing new . . . there was a real big significance to the birth order in Old Testament times. In the Hebrew language, the term “youngest” meant not merely the last-born, but also the lowest in rank. Those who are not firstborn children can sometimes be heard commenting about how the firstborn has certain unfair advantages.

One example of this, as observed by Bill Butterworth, can show up in the family photo album. To paraphrase Bill, we might hear a parent say something like this as they open their family photo album, “Here is a picture of our firstborn, little Sally, the moment she entered this world. Here is a picture of Sally at two minutes old; here is another one at ten minutes. Oh, here is baby Sally taking her first nap, this is her first bath, and this is her first meal. Oh, here are some pictures of day two!” Then, the same parent continues, “Here are pictures of Timothy, our second-born. Here he is when he was born, here is his first smile, and here is his first birthday.” Then, it comes time to show the pictures of the last-born: “Here is a picture of when little Danny was born, and here is his tenth birthday . . . wow, we need to take more pictures of Danny!”

A fascinating thread runs through the Old Testament having to do with a *reversal of birth order* and the rights that normally came with being a firstborn son among the people of Israel. Ishmael was the first son born to Abraham, but God chose Isaac. Esau, a twin, came out of the womb first, but God decided to continue the line of the patriarchs through his younger twin brother Jacob. Jacob’s son Joseph had ten older brothers, but God called Joseph to a role of leadership and authority in the

family. David was the baby of the family and had seven older brothers, but he became the king of Israel.

What is God saying through these significant reversals: that firstborn kids are a bunch of spoiled brats and he likes middle or younger kids better? As a non-firstborn child, I have to give my unbiased opinion and say that's exactly the point. Not really! Something far more significant is going on here.

In those days, everything went to the firstborn—all rights, property, and privileges. That's the way the power structures worked at that time in history. But God is breaking into the ordinary cultural practices of human life and doing something new. Old limitations and boundaries about who counts and who doesn't don't apply anymore. He's not bound or beholden to any human system or power. His kingdom is going to shake some things up. In light of God's power at work in our lives and the world, birth order is really not that big of a deal.

## Making the Connection

1. Where did you fall in your family's birth order and how has this impacted you?

## Knowing and Being Known

### Read | Samuel 16:1 – 13

2. Imagine you were a fly on the wall of Jesse's living room while this drama unfolds. What would you have learned about *one* of the following characters in the story?
  - Jesse
  - Samuel
  - David
  - God

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## A Wild Heart

David's heart was characterized by a sense of wild abandon. His heart was fully committed to God. In Psalm 9:1 David says, "I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders." That same passionate declaration occurs again in Psalms 86 and 111. David had an unguarded passion and heart, and he never held it back. He wasn't calculating and cautious with his heart. He was generous and free.

One morning I was driving to work and paused to observe some kids waiting for the school bus. Most of them were trying to look cool because there were other kids present. But this one little guy—I would guess he was about six years old—was standing a few feet apart from the others, so happy he was jumping up and down. He had a huge smile on his face and was just bouncing with joy. In a sad, sober mass of school-bound kids, this one child stood out among the rest. As I watched him I wanted to get out of my car and jump up and down with him. I thought, *It must make God happy when he sees his children so filled with joy and gratitude that they can't help but jump up and down.*

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### Read 2 Samuel 6:12–22

3. This passage depicts a vivid and dramatic contrast between King David and his wife Michal. How are their hearts different and how does this impact their actions?
  
4. Michal did not feel free to express herself with wild abandon and she tried to get David to settle down and be more dignified. What are some of the reasons that we might hold back and not let our hearts loose before God and others?

5. Everyone looks different when they celebrate and go wild for God. What do you look like when you are expressing your love and appreciation for God?

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### A Reflective Heart

David's heart was characterized by deep reflection. In one of David's psalms he writes, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts" (Psalm 139:23). It is a rare combination to find a person who is committed to passionate action on the one hand, and deep reflection on the other, but David was such a man. David's heart grew deep and reflective in all his years alone with God.

David spent much of his life waiting. When he was a kid, he tended sheep ... this provided lots of quiet time. Then there came this amazing day when the prophet Samuel arrived and anointed David as king. But David didn't just march into Jerusalem after this and sit on a throne. Saul was still king so David went back to the sheep ... and waited some more. But the years in the wilderness were not wasted ones. He was learning to be alone with God. He was growing deep.

Richard Foster wrote, "Superficiality is the curse of our age."

Richard Swenson said, "We're so bombarded with noise, the gift that most people need this Christmas is not a cordless phone, but a phone-less cord."

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6. When you are running on the fast track of life and fail to make space for quiet reflection, how does this impact *one* of the following?
  - Your relationships with friends and family
  - Your attitude at work
  - Your outlook on the future
  - How you face times of conflict and tension
  - Your sense of intimacy with God

7. What are some of the things that can get in the way of our developing and maintaining a reflective heart?
  
8. David found space for deep reflection in the pastures with his small flock of sheep. What place or practices help you develop a reflective heart?

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### **A Heart with Stubborn Love**

David's heart was characterized, right down to the core, by stubborn love. In Psalm 78:72 we read that David shepherded the people with integrity of heart. The idea here is that his heart was undivided. It's the opposite of fickle. He loved people with the loyal heart of a shepherd who kept loving the sheep, even when they were obstinate.

Think about how David loved Saul, even when it was hard. King Saul became increasingly corrupt and tormented by pathological jealousy of David. Saul was constantly deceiving David and on several occasions he tried to kill him. What's most amazing is how, through it all, David loved him. Twice David could have killed Saul—and he would have been justified in the eyes of most people—but he refused to do it. When Saul finally died, David wrote one of the most beautiful poems ever written as a lament for him, "How the mighty have fallen!... O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul!" How could David find tears for a man like that? He knew all about Saul's faults, better than anybody, and he knew about Saul's possibilities, and he loved him to the end.

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9. Tell about a person in your life who has exemplified stubborn love for you. How has their life taught you about the heart of God?
  
10. We all have relationships with people who have hurt and wronged us. Think of one person to whom you need to extend stubborn love and how you might do this in the coming weeks. (Share your thoughts without using the person's name.)

## Celebrating and Being Celebrated

When was the last time you were so full of gratitude to God that you jumped up and down? When was a time when you just had to express your joy with some measure of wild abandon? Take a moment to write down a few things God has done or is doing in your life that cause you to celebrate his goodness.

Take a moment as a group to jump up and down together! You don't have to do this, literally, although you should feel free to if you would like. Read your list of good-God things and share joy together. Imagine God watching your group as you share, a loving Father who rejoices in our joy . . . and dare to get a little reckless as you celebrate together.

## Loving and Being Loved

At the end of Psalm 23, David declares, with a passionate heart, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” He loved God with a stubborn love that would not relent. He didn’t say, “I hope that I will dwell in the house of the Lord.” He didn’t say, “It may be that I’ll dwell in the house.”

David had the heart of a racehorse. He declared for all to hear, “I’m staying in the house. I know I make a mess sometimes, and I may spill on the rug, and knock down the lamps, and break all the expensive stuff. I know what a pain it is to have me in the house, but I’ll tell you what: You’re going to have to drag me out of here kicking and screaming. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” That was the heart of David and it can be our heart as well.

Take time as a group to pray together. Thank God for opening his house to you through the life, love, and sacrifice of Jesus. Thank God for loving you that much. Declare to God that you love him and that you will joyfully dwell in his house forever!

## Serving and Being Served

There are times when we are called to serve others, and times we are invited to serve God. As you begin this series on the life of David, consider a simple act of worship that will serve God, yourself, and your small group. Take time in the coming weeks to read through the psalms David wrote. Just look at the superscription above each psalm and you will see if it is a psalm of David. Begin with Psalm 3, and read one or two of David’s psalms each day. This process will give you insight into the heart of God, David, and your own heart.